Elements of successful communication

As you have been learning, communication is the driving force behind PACE because data professionals need to be able to communicate effectively with stakeholders while working through different stages of a project. You have already learned some important tips for effective communication. But, there are a few more elements for successful communication you should consider. This reading provides best practices for successful communication that you can follow in your workplace communications.

Understanding why

Having a clear vision of why you are communicating is the first thing you need to consider. Your "why" depends on the context set by the business or organization you work for as well as the goals orienting the project. When crafting any form of communication, use your why to guide main ideas so that your audience can identify how to act or respond with purpose.

When you prepare to communicate, take a moment to outline important goals and expectations you have, like:

- Goals of the project you are communicating about
- What you hope to gain from this communication
- What you're asking your audience to do
- What you need your audience to understand

Understanding the why behind your communication will help you organize your thoughts and develop clearer, more direct communication.

Set the stage

When you are developing effective communication, you have to consider more than just the why– you also need to think about *where* the communication is taking place. Setting will have a direct impact on how your message is delivered and how you shape it. As you prepare to communicate, consider the most appropriate way to communicate for the setting you plan to be in.

On the job, it's possible that you will communicate in a variety of settings. What information you share, how you share it, and how you follow up will depend on the context of that communication. For example, you might:

- Ask a coworker for advice about a recent obstacle over lunch
- Send an email updating all the stakeholders about an important project
- Share progress with your team in a weekly meeting
- Present the results of your analysis to a boardroom of executives

Each of these settings will require you to consider how you're communicating, what each of those audiences need, and what you need from them in return. As you develop your communication skills, don't forget that the setting can be just as important as the actual communication.

How to work one-on-one and in small groups

One of the most common settings you will work in as a data professional is a one-on-one or small group meeting. As you prepare to communicate in these settings, remember that it is important to:

- Respect your colleagues' time by scheduling a meeting in advance
- Convey interest by practicing active listening
- Check for alignment by asking questions

All about time

Time is a currency in the professional world. It's very important to be efficient–this includes making sure your communication is understandable so that stakeholders can quickly comprehend your message. To ensure your message is clear and concise, remember to always:

- Use direct language
- Minimize wordiness
- Avoid unnecessary details
- Always strive for clarity
- Use proper grammar and punctuation
- Keep vocabulary simple and avoid technical language
- Break complex ideas into shorter sentences to make concepts easier to understand and remember

Not only will these suggestions help make your communication efficient and easier to understand, they will also save you time having to re-explain important concepts. And more than that, your colleagues will be grateful that you respected their time.

Active Listening

As you begin your career as a data professional, you will spend a lot of time in meetings and in conversation. Many stakeholders are from different departments both inside and outside of your organization. The information shared during these interactions is valuable. Often, it's where you gather insight into how the business operates, its goals, key milestones, and parameters within projects.

When you listen actively, you:

- Invite understanding of others
- Develop empathy for others and their responsibilities
- Build a connection with colleagues
- Promote trust

When you are practicing active listening, you make the effort to understand the speaker's point of view. This helps you understand what other people are trying to communicate and sets you up to ask better, more insightful questions.

Asking Questions

Data professionals aren't automatically developing solutions. For data analysis to be effective, data professionals need to ask the right questions. In fact, the entire data analytical process depends on it.

Asking questions is a powerful communication tool. Asking the right questions can lead to institutional learning and a fruitful exchange of ideas. Many times, questions invite innovation and initiate efforts that can help improve projects and overall workflow.

Asking questions builds rapport and trust among team members. The right questions can often help mitigate business risks by uncovering unforeseen pitfalls and hazards. Here are a few tips to help guide your questioning:

- Ask questions that haven't been answered already

- Ask questions that reveal the bigger picture
- Ask questions that gather information or further the knowledge of the team
- Ask questions that can help clarify misunderstandings

Effective questions are more likely to get you the answers you need to do your best work– which is good for the whole team.

Key takeaways

In this reading, you learned that communication is present in all aspects of data professional work. Focus on the purpose, setting, and timing of your communication in order to promote more successful discussions with your team. Additionally, becoming an active listener that asks relevant questions enables more efficient communication and invites the perspective of other stakeholders. All these factors add up and make a big difference in how effectively you communicate as a data professional.